

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

291100Z Nov 05

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002326

SIPDIS

USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE ASS TO POLAD
LONDON PASS TO JACMOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

E.O. DECL: 11/26/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: VICE PRESIDENT ATIKU UPDATE ON
DOMESTIC POLITICS

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN CAMPBELL for reasons 1.5 b)
and d).

Refs: a) Abuja 1957, b) Abuja 1902 and previous

1. (S) Summary: Vice President Atiku says that he has taken the necessary steps to register, legally, a new political party through which he can contest the 2007 elections should he fail to win the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) nomination. For the time being, however, he is using the Movement for Defense of Democracy (MDD) to maintain a dialogue with President Obasanjo and to try to retain some influence within the PDP. If that dialogue fails from his perspective, then he will roll the MDD into his new political party, which will be joined, he said, by elements from other, already existing parties. He remains confident that he will be elected next President of Nigeria. He said that the President lacks sufficient political support in the National Assembly and among the governors to amend the constitution in a way that would allow Obasanjo to extend his time in office past 2007. And, he continued, Obasanjo has little support amongst the military, meaning that he has no military card to play. End summary.

2. (S) Atiku asked to see me on Thanksgiving Day (November 24), immediately upon my return from Washington and just before he traveled to Lagos to meet, he said, with Yoruba political personalities disaffected from Obasanjo. He said that he had registered legally a new political party, but, for the time being, he has continued to use the MDD as a vehicle for dialogue with the President and the PDP. If this dialogue fails, he said, he will move the MDD into his new party, which will include significant support from former adherents of the ANPP. He said that he was rallying the North and the Southwest against efforts in the Senate to provide some means for Obasanjo to remain in office.

3. (S) Atiku remains confident that Obasanjo efforts to extend his term in office will fail because he has insufficient support in the National Assembly and among the governors. The President has also lost the support of the military, he continued, so there is no military card for him to play. Ensuring that the rule of law is upheld, and the constitution is followed, he continued, is the responsibility of Nigerians. But, Nigeria democracy needs international sympathy and support.

4. (S) I replied that U.S. policy remains based on adherence to the rule of law, the need for Nigeria 2007 elections to be free and fair, to be more credible than its predecessors, and that a civilian government should be succeeded by a civilian government - the period of military regimes is over. Atiku commented that Obasanjo has little interest in ensuring free and fair elections because he knows that he could not win one. That, he said, is the reason why legislation to strengthen the Independent Electoral Commission has bogged down. He said that his supporters in Washington are working with friendly members of Congress for hearings on the Obasanjo third-term issue.

5. (S) At the close of the conversation, Atiku turned to the current government macro-economic achievements, which, he said, lays the groundwork for the future ending of poverty. The challenge, he continued is to apply the new macro-economic policies to the real economy to generate jobs and promote rural investment. When I commented on Nigeria positive, international role, Atiku acknowledged it, but said it was far more than Obasanjo achievement:
Nigeria active role in West Africa
reflected its long-term, strategic interests.

6. (S) Comment: Atiku believes that Obasanjo is doing all that he can to manipulate the political system to remain in power, and thereby block the Vice President's aspirations to be president. Only at one point in our conversation did he briefly allude to vil counselors t

the Villa as pushing Obasanjo forward; Atiku believes that it is Obasanjo's own ambition that is driving him. He also believes that Obasanjo will fail because of the lack of domestic support, and that he himself will win the presidency in 2007 because of grass-roots support and superior political organization. Atiku is also wrapping himself in the undeniable achievements of the current government: macro-economic reform and diplomatic activism while at the same time attacking Obasanjo. Still, the break between the two is not total: when we met, President Obasanjo had left for Malta for a Commonwealth meeting, leaving Atiku in charge. Atiku commented in passing that former dictator Ibrahim Babangida, with probably the deepest pockets of any political figure in the country, will not subject himself to the rough and tumble of electoral politics. On the other hand, Babangida told me that he is interested in establishing a new political party to contest in 2007, and, if his new party fails to win office, to function as a loyal opposition. Atiku also hinted at a possible personal rapprochement with former head of state (also an ex-military dictator) Buhari. Certainly if one were to throw his support to the other, the result would be a strong political alignment. Clearly the political architecture of Nigeria in the run-up to 2007 is still evolving.

FUREY